

Priority Issue: Women and the Peace Process

Insecurity has had profound impacts on the country, and Afghan women have been adversely affected in a multitude of ways. As stated in the most recent UNAMA Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: "Throughout Afghanistan conflict-related violence destroyed homes, livelihoods and property, displaced thousands of families and restricted the freedom of civilians to access education, health and other services."¹

According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's report, the total number of civilian casualties during the year 1396 amounted to 9,413 people. Among them, the number of deaths was 3,239 and the number of injured was 6,174 people. 4,141 of them were men, 803 of them (8.5%) were women, 2,692 of them (28.5%) were children, and the age and sex of 1,777 others (18.8%) were unclear. Compared to 1395, the death toll has increased about 15%, but the injured figure has decreased by 21%, while total number of casualties decreased by 9%.²

To achieve stability, effective governance, and prosperity, Afghanistan needs to follow a political solution. Initiating the Consultative Peace Jirga from 2-4 June 2010 was one of the efforts of the Afghan government to seek the opinions of Afghan people in regard to peace and political solution for the conflict. During the Jirga, participants demonstrated the will among Afghan society to reconcile differences politically in order to end the conflict.

Some of the key steps taken by the Afghan government in the peace process include:

1. Initiation and launch of Peace and Reconciliation Process in July 2010 to build sustainable peace and security in Afghanistan using political, economic and social approaches to engage a broad range of stakeholders;
2. Establishment of a High Peace Council composed of women and men to set policy, strengthen political confidence and build consensus in the country;
3. Adoption of UNSCR 1325 and development of an action plan to implement the resolution;
4. The Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. Its first meeting was conducted on 6 June 2017 and the second one was held on 28 February 2018. The Kabul Process is a forum and vehicle under the leadership of the Afghan Government to lead peace efforts to end violence in Afghanistan.

As a UN Member State, Afghanistan adopted UNSCR 1325 and developed a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement it. The plan aims to increase women's participation in peace processes and the security sector as well as address issues around protection and relief and recovery services for women. The NAP spans over two phases of four year each. Phase one will cover 2015-2018 and phase two will cover 2019-2022. One of the objectives of NAP is to enhance women's meaningful participation in the reconciliation, negotiation, and re-integration at all levels.³

The issue of confidence in peace and meaningful and active participation of Afghan women in the peace process is still a concern. According to The Asia Foundation survey report published in 2017, only half of the Afghan population (52.3%) believed in 2017 that reconciliation with the Taliban is possible. Yet, responding to a different question in 2016, 62.9% of Afghans believed that reconciliation could help stabilize the country.⁴

Another important step taken by Afghan government was establishing of High Peace Council in 2010. It has 70 members, of which 9 are women. The High Peace Council (HPC) sets the agenda by leading in political and strategic decision-making. Peace-building programs are led by governors in the provinces through the Provincial Peace Committees (PPCs).

The role of women at the HPC is something to think about. According to Women's' Regional Network, the role of women had been mostly symbolic with little to no decision-making authority within the previous structure of HPC. However, as a result of consistent advocacy efforts by women's rights activists and civil society with support from international partners, more women are now included in the decision-making stages of the HPC.⁵

Besides participating in the HPC, the role of women in promoting social peace, friendship and educating a generation for a bright future is vital. Women and girls have different roles in the home, community and nation that are critical to the promotion of social peace.

The 4th Symposium on Afghan women that was held from 15th -17th of May, 2017 under the theme of "Afghan Women, Messengers of Peace" in Kabul also stressed the role of women in establishing social peace.

To boost Afghan women's roles in peace process, the following strategies need to be adopted:

1. Help and support women to play their roles in building social peace in the country;
2. Organize awareness raising programs to promote the culture of peace at family and society levels;
3. Advocate for implementation of the UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan; and
4. Monitor the negotiation process to ensure that women are actually at the table and include women in donor-organized processes.

¹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Kabul, Afghanistan, February 2016.

² Afghanistan Annual Report 2015 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Kabul, Afghanistan, February 2016, available at: <http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports>

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325-Women, Peace, and Security, 2015-2022

⁴ The Asia Foundation, Afghanistan in 2017 A Survey of the Afghan People, available at: <https://asiafoundation.org/where-we-work/afghanistan/survey/>

⁵ Women's Regional Network, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan's High Peace Council: Women Make the Difference, available at: <https://www.womensregionalnetwork.org/single-post/2018/01/16/Afghanistans-High-Peace-Council-Women-Make-the-Difference>